1408 Mission Avenue
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Whole Earth
MAGAZINE

October 17, 1997

To: David Katz
Sonoma Land Trust
707.526.6930

Danica Remy
Farcast
547.1597/ 381-3846

Re: Your respective follow-ups memos to Wednesday's meeting

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Dear David and Danica,

Point Foundation's plan to maybe hand off the magazine to another owner (and the plan is officially Point Foundation's — Peter and I are employees) does not interest me, as I stated the other evening. I don't consider it part of my job to support efforts to find a new home for the magazine.

Peter constantly complains about how difficult things are for him as editor. As publisher, I have regularly in the past and continue to deal with situations that challenge both Whole Earth's and my professional integrity. Without Kim, Mike or Liz in the office, I am now in the position of dealing with all the daily business details, as well as many editorial concerns, specifically production. Remember that we are in the midst of production. I do this while Peter spends his time engaged in "high level strategizing and negotiating".

Cooking up new ideas for the magazine is not an immediate priority. Nor is working on future issues. Either we secure further funding by the end of the month, or we don't. If we do secure funding, then we can consider moving forward. If we don't secure further funding, either the magazine as is folds, or some other institution picks up the pieces and carries on.

I don't consider it worth investing my time, labor and nerves into a business that mostly exists in one person's head. Any planning or thought that goes into the magazine at this stage should only have to do with business strategy. All talk about funding special issues, reworking budgets and recalculating unit costs is so secondary to making tough decisions about the viability of the magazine as a commercial product. The success or failure of a business does not depend upon how much money is in the bank. It depends upon the existence of a marketable product for which there is a measurable demand. Defining that product and those who demand it is all we should be thinking about now. Then we can decide how the budget should be re-worked. And all future editorial decisions would have to be circumscribed by that business strategy. And the strategy would have to be written down and approved by the board, Peter and myself.

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I ask you, what is Whole Earth magazine? If you can't tell me what it is and who its audience is in simple concise terms, then I ask you, why, as business professionals, do you continue to support Whole Earth? I hate to be long winded, but what I've said above is so obvious to me and most people I know who survive in the business world. Yet neither of you insist that Whole Earth operate according to the same limitations that all other real businesses do. Near as I can tell, the next 3 issues planned are all highly stimulating intellectually, yet I as publisher I have a hard time figuring what they all share thematically, nor specifically who they address.

As board and staff members, we are investing so much time into one magazine issue, part of which maybe 20,000 people will read. In 2 years, no one will remember it. But people will notice whether or not the magazine exists. Please, as a group, let's be honest with ourselves. Does Whole Earth have a possible future or not? If we as a group (not hypothetical others) share the conviction that it does, how do we secure that future? If not, let's pack it in.

I simply don't have the energy any longer to try to keep up with every new scenario, idea and editorial twist.

Sincerely,

Alexander Gault

Alexander Gault
Publisher